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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study that involved 25 school administrators who participated in one of five administrator-preparation programs at four New England universities. The study examined participants' perceptions of job preparedness and the ways in which components of formal training programs (internships, mentoring relationships, reflective practice, and student cohorts) prepared school leaders for their jobs. Data were gathered from interviews with the 25 administrators, analysis of school documents, and a survey of 627 administrators, teachers, and supervisors at each of the administrator's schools. The survey elicited 394 responses, an overall 63 percent response rate. The findings include discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of student cohorts, the key role of reflection within a program, the authenticity and connectedness provided by internships, and the importance of mentoring relationships. Suggestions for improving administrative training are: (1) include students with varied experiences from nontraditional backgrounds; (2) design programs that foster learning and provide a supportive environment for adults, such as cohorts and mentoring; and (3) implement learning practices and an integrated curriculum that reflect work-place problems and promote the development of problem-solving skills and reflective practice. One table is included. (Contains 55 references.) (LMI)

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Challenging Tradition: Re-examining the Preparation of Educational Leaders for the Workplace

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Abstract

This paper describes a study involving 25 school administrators who attended one of five administrator preparation programs at four New England universities. The study addressed research questions regarding perceptions of administrators' job preparedness and how components of formal training programs (i.e., internships, mentoring relationships, reflective practice, and student cohorts) prepared school leaders for their jobs. The findings include discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of student cohorts, the key role of reflection within a program, the authenticity and connectedness provided by an internship, and the importance of mentoring relationships.

In recent years leadership tasks and responsibilities of school administrators have become more complex as the demands for improved education have increased (Searching for the Right Reforms, 1989). The educational reform movement, in conjunction with state mandates, stringent accountability procedures, and the proliferation of regulations governing schools, are challenging administrator preparation programs to prepare principals with research and leadership skills beyond that needed even a decade ago (Danforth , n.d.). Not only must administrators have the instructional skills to provide current school leadership, but they must also have the knowledge, skills, and ability to envision and implement "future schools."

The increasing demands on principals have been accompanied by a rise in the number of questions about the current, traditional system for training public school administrators[1] (Milstein & Associates, 1993; Murphy & Hallinger, 1987; UCEA, 1987). Not only are the demands greater on administrators and on the programs that prepare them; but during the 1990's, 60% of current school principals will retire (Anderson, 1989). Thus, the demands to improve administrator preparation programs are accompanied by increased demands on these programs to produce more candidates with the skills necessary to replace those who retire. If the majority of the 500 institutions which prepare administrators continue to train the country's future leaders using outdated administrator preparation models (UCEA, 1987), the next generation of educational leaders will not be equipped to make the changes required to prepare students to compete in a global economy (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986).

In response to these pressures (e.g., educational reform, new laws and regulations), and pressure from professional groups (e.g., National Commission for Excellence in Educational Administration [NCEEA], 1987), numerous colleges and universities have reconceptualized their administrator

preparation programs. Many of these programs, in particular the Danforth Programs for the Preparation of School Principals (DPPSP), have integrated reflective practice in a program framework which includes internships, mentoring relationships, reflection activities, and student cohorts. Alternative administrator preparation programs utilizing this framework are labor intensive and costly to operate, therefore universities must determine if these programs are meeting the needs of school districts by preparing graduates for the workplace. This paper discusses perceptions of administrators' job preparedness and how components of formal training programs such as internships, mentoring relationships, reflective practice, and student cohorts have prepared school leaders for their jobs.

Background

Support for the use of internships, mentoring relationships, reflective practice, and student cohorts can be found in literature related to adult development and learning (Knowles, 1980; Kolb, 1984), interactive leadership (Sergiovanni, 1984), cohort and support systems (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Muse, Wasden, & Thomas; 1988; Yerkes, Norris, Basom, & Burnett, 1994), cognitive psychology (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Leithwood & Stager, 1989; Leithwood, Steinbach, & Begley, 1992; Prestine & LeGrand, 1991) and reflective practice (Barnett & Brill, 1988; Brookfield, 1987; Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1984; Sheckley, Allen, & Keeton, 1993; Short & Rinehart, 1993). Although a considerable amount of research has been conducted regarding administrator preparation, this study adds to our understanding because it examines these program components from the perspective of working administrators.

Internships

Proponents of adult learning theory (e.g., Knowles, 1987; Kolb, 1984) and cognitive psychology (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991; Leithwood, Steinbach, & Begley, 1992) emphasize the importance of internship learning. They believe that learning is not done in isolation but is grounded in the real world

of experience (Prestine & LeGrand, 1991). Internships can provide prospective administrators the opportunities to interact with "the real world"; the principals, the teachers, and the other administrators in varying environments in which they will be working. Therefore, a well-designed internship, in conjunction with a reflective process, should, according to adult learning theorists (Benner, 1984; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1980; Knowles, 1980; Kolb, 1984) and cognitive psychology researchers (Leithwood, Steinbach, & Begley, 1992) enhance learning and leadership skills.

Supporters of internships propose that field-based experience assures students the opportunity to gain the leadership skills required to support schools (Daresh, 1987a; LaPlant, 1988; Milstein, Bobroff, & Restine, 1991; Skalski et al., 1987) and that the social nature of the environment experienced in an internship fosters the development of cooperative, collaborative learning skills (Prestine & LeGrand, 1991). Hills (1975) emphasizes the importance of the internship suggesting that its influence on one's beliefs, attitudes, and values determines the difference between moderately and extremely successful administrative performance. However, the value of field experience is questioned when these experiences are not accompanied by reflection time (Allison & Allison, 1993; Prestine & LeGrand, 1991; Schön, 1983, 1987).

Mentoring Relationships

In conjunction with the internship, Danforth program interns are assigned a mentor who is an experienced school administrator (Barnett, 1990). The mentor should act as the intern's guide during the internship and provide the opportunities for reflective practice. Reflection with an "expert" can be uniquely valuable (Daloz, 1986). Such reflection will encourage the intern to formulate ideas, solutions, and philosophies within the framework of the practitioner's world. Daresh and Playko (1989) suggest that through the mentoring process interns can build confidence and competence, improve

communication skills with colleagues, have the opportunity to blend theory with real-life applications in the field, and become "connected" with someone who understands the world in which they must work. Prestine and LeGrand (1991) explore the idea that administrative interns have a bird's eye view of how their mentors view learning and problem solving in their own schools. They contend that this critical reflection allows the intern to understand administrative practice in the cultural, political, and moral context of schooling (Cambron-McCabe, 1993).

Mentors guide interns in the context of adult learning principles by fostering interns' reflection, experimentation, and self-direction. This guidance can impact the intern's learning gained through experience and enhance the intern's transfer of learning from the classroom to the job (Barnett, 1990).

Reflective Practice

In the Danforth framework reflective practice is a crucial component of administrator preparation. The idea of using reflection to turn experience into learning can be found in educational literature (Boud, Keough & Walker, 1985). Hart (1993) contends that the use of reflective practice in administrative training improves interns' field experience. Opportunity to reflect on the many experiences of an internship allows interns to connect theory with practice and improve problem identification and problem solving skills (Prestine & LeGrand, 1991). Hart (1993) asserts that these skills are essential for aspiring administrators because "the complexity of school problems and the volume of knowledge on which school administrators draw in search of new perspectives and solutions are increasing" (p. 339). In conjunction with the internship, reflection allows for the comparison of students' and practicing administrators' behaviors and attitudes (Barnett & Muse, 1993).

From a practical standpoint, the environment of an internship or mentoring relationship may not allow time for learning to take place through reflective practice; therefore, reflective practice in a formal

setting could be a useful learning component of an administrator preparation program. In fact, Barth (1990) contends that to initiate school reform and change, principals must continuously reflect on their visions for school change. Dana and Pitts (1993, p. 335) suggest that, "reflection, then is at the heart of school change and improvement." The environment many principals will face may require greater need to reflect. In fact, Prestine and LeGrand (1991) propose that "the ability to reflect and interpret may be the most valuable asset the practitioner can possess" (p. 73). This theory suggests that reflective practice is not just a vehicle for learning during administrative preparation, but an art that continuously draws upon past experience and which should be mastered for use in administrative practice.

Student Cohorts

The last component of the Danforth framework is student cohorts. The use of cohorts in administrative preparation programs is becoming more prevalent (Barnett & Muse, 1993). Adult theorists (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989) suggest that positive affiliation is a powerful motivator of adult learning and that the development of affiliation in a cohort is likely to promote the sharing of information and expertise among group members (Kathrein, 1981; Knowles, 1980). Several empirical studies (Burnett, 1989; Hill, 1992; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Coffin, 1995; Yerkes, Basom, Barnett, & Norris, 1995) support cohort grouping. Cohorts can create a supportive environment where respect, openness, and acceptance facilitate quality interaction and collegial sharing (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Yerkes, Norris, Basom, & Barnett, 1994). Cohorts can enhance students' self-esteem, and provide professional collegial networks which give students a greater sense of belonging and reduce isolation (Yerkes, Norris, Basom, & Barnett, 1994). Burnett (1989) and Hill (1992) report that cohort members experience improved academic performance and are more likely to complete their program of study. In addition, students feel they receive more support, feel greater affiliation, are exposed to varied

perspectives, improve their reflective practice, and influence program development (Hill, 1992). Milstein (1993) proposes that students who participate in cohorts are more likely to practice collaborative leadership as school administrators; "the cohort approach provides a model of how schools can be transformed into adult learning communities" (Milstein & Associates, 1993, p. 201). This idea suggests that cohort formation can be used as a way to empower people in other work environments. Overall, supporters contend that the use of cohorts has a positive effect on students, faculty, and programs.

Danforth programs have been reported to have the following features: internships, mentoring relationships, reflective practice, and student cohorts (Milstein & Associates, 1993). However, little empirical research has determined how these program components impact job preparedness and learning of administrators. This study addressed research questions regarding perceptions of administrators' job preparedness and how components of formal training programs (i.e., internships, mentoring relationships, reflective practices, and student cohorts) prepared school leaders for their jobs.

Methods and Procedures

In a modified naturalistic design (Patton, 1990) this study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data over a four month period. Data included: semi-structured audiotaped interviews with principals and assistant principals, artifacts describing university administrator preparation programs, and a modified form of the Educational Administrator Effectiveness Profile (EAEP) administered to administrators, their supervisors, and teacher colleagues.

Sample

Criterion sampling was used to select 25 administrators from 5 administrator preparation programs in 2 New England states. Of the five programs studied, only one program utilized the Danforth framework. Application and program requirements of the five programs are compared in Figure 1.

Length of time reported as a principal or assistant principal for the 25 participants ranged from 3 months to 4 1/2 years. The overall mean time of administrative experience was 22 months. (Six of the participants were in their second administrative position.)

	PROGRAM*				
	A	B	C	D	Danforth
	Application Requirements				
GREs	x	x			
Masters	x	x	x	x	x
GPA	3.0	3.25	3.3	x**	x**
Essay	x		x	x	x
Interview		x	x		x
Recommendations	2	2	2	2	4
	Program Requirements				
Years to finish	6	6	6	6	2
Credits	30	33	30	30	31
Field Experience	Field project or formal internship (3 credits)	2 internship experiences - 150 hrs each (4 credits each)	Field experience (100 hours) or project (3 credits)	Summary project (practicum) or comprehen-sive exam	Internship 90 days (10 credits) and 2 projects
Courses	Semi-structured	Semi-structured	Semi-structured	Random	Sequenced
Class group	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Cohort
Portfolio		x			x
Reflection Seminars		x	x		x

Figure 1 Application and program requirements of five administrator preparation programs.

* Programs included the Sixth-Year programs at Central Connecticut State University, Southern Connecticut State University, and the University of Connecticut; the Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study (CAGS) at Rhode Island College, and the Danforth sponsored University of Connecticut Administrator Preparation Program (UCAPP)

** GPAs are considered in conjunction with other application criterion. (There is no set cut off score.)

A cautionary note is needed. Because of the evolving nature of administrative preparation programs and the differences in the administrators' personal and career experiences, the study does not

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compare the five administrator preparation programs. Instead, the study analyzes those program features that affected the job preparedness and learning of working administrators.

Data Collection

Three types of data were collected: audiotaped, semi-structured interviews with administrators; artifacts from universities; and surveys measuring the job preparedness of administrators. Using an interview guide, the researcher interviewed 25 school administrators. To corroborate information shared by the administrators during the interviews, the researcher obtained college catalogs and program literature from the five administrator preparation programs. To increase the credibility of the interview data, the researcher administered the *Educational Administrator Job Preparedness Survey* to the 25 administrators, 13 supervisors, and up to 25 teachers working in each of the administrators' schools. (Three schools had fewer than 25 teachers.) A total of 627 surveys were distributed. Twelve principals, 13 assistant principals, 361 teachers, and 8 supervisors returned surveys. The overall response rate was 63%.

The *Educational Administrator Job Preparedness Survey*, a 73-item self report survey, measures the extent administrators are prepared to perform basic job skills, to demonstrate support behaviors, and implement best practice as identified in the educational literature and research. The survey is an adaptation of the Educational Administrator Effectiveness Profile (EAEP), a 120-item instrument developed by Miller & Ruderman (1984). The EAEP measures eleven dimensions of administrator performance: (1) setting goals and objectives, (2) planning, (3) making decisions and solving problems, (4) managing business and fiscal affairs, (5) assessing progress, (6) delegating responsibilities, (7) communicating, (8) building and maintaining relationships, (9) demonstrating professional commitment,

(10) improving instruction, and (11) developing staff. The EAEP was modified and reviewed by experts in this area[2].

Data Analysis

The teacher and administrator survey data were analyzed by administrative preparation program, then across the programs. Additional analyses compared the four non-Danforth programs to the Danforth program. T-tests for independent samples indicated that there was a significant statistical difference in teachers' perceptions of the Danforth and non-Danforth administrators' job preparedness ($t = -2.3$ $p < .05$). While the difference in scores was statistically significant (i.e. the non-Danforth scores were slightly higher), the difference may not have practical significance because the mean ratings for administrators from both types of programs fell between four and five on the survey Likert scale. A rating of "four" indicated that survey respondents perceived the administrator to be very well prepared and a rating of "five" indicated that survey respondents perceived the administrator to be extremely well prepared.

One-way ANOVA results indicated that there was a significant statistical difference in teachers' perceptions of their administrators' job preparedness across the programs at a .05 alpha level ($F_{4,344} = 3.0$ $p < .05$). The Tukey HSD test indicated at a .05 significance level, that teachers' perceptions of job preparedness were significantly higher for the administrators from one of the non-Danforth Sixth-Year programs (M=4.5) than for the Danforth program administrators (M=4.2). There were no significant differences among the other three programs. While the difference in scores was statistically significant for the two administrator preparation programs, the difference may not have practical significance because once again, the mean ratings for both groups fell between four and five on the survey Likert scale suggesting that the administrators were very well prepared.

A comparison of the Danforth and non-Danforth program administrators' job preparedness scores indicated that there was not a significant difference in administrators' perceptions of job preparedness related to "administrative tasks, abilities, and practices" between Danforth and non-Danforth program graduates (t=.52 N.S.). Further analysis of the administrators' ratings of job preparedness across the programs using one-way ANOVA indicated that there was no significant difference in administrators' self-perceptions of job preparedness among the administrator preparation programs at the .05 alpha level ($F_{4,20} = 0.63$ N.S.).

An overall comparison of the Danforth and non-Danforth groups indicates little variation in the means and standard deviations of the job preparedness scores of the teachers and administrators. In addition, a T-test for paired samples indicated there was no significant difference in the job preparedness ratings of administrators and their teachers (t=.083 $p < .01$). Yet, teachers tended to rate their administrators higher on job preparedness. Of the 24 job preparedness means, 15 of the teacher means were higher than the administrator means. (One administrator did not give permission for the distribution of surveys to teachers in the school.)

Qualitative Data

The researcher analyzed the qualitative data using taxonomic and domain analysis (Spradley, 1979). Patterns and themes were grouped and regrouped in terms of semantic relationships. The qualitative findings have been divided into four sections. The first section identifies the specific differences between Danforth and non-Danforth programs that administrators believed contributed to their administrative job preparedness and learning. This is followed by a discussion of other program components and themes that were general to all five programs. A third section describes those experiences outside of formal training that contributed to the job preparedness of the administrators

regardless of their training program. Lastly, recommendations for future changes to formal administrator preparation program are described. Analysis of the interview data indicated that differences existed between the Danforth and non-Danforth programs which affected job preparedness and learning in beginning administrators. These differences related to student cohorts, mentoring relationships, and reflective practice. All participants noted the importance of internships.

Student Cohorts

One of the most significant findings of the study was the importance the Danforth program administrators placed on student cohorts. Many of the Danforth administrators who had participated in a cohort indicated it was the most significant part of their program. Of the five programs studied, only the Danforth program was designed so that students completed core courses and attended reflection seminars and social functions as a formal cohort. Some of the non-Danforth program graduates were part of informal cohorts (i.e., they jointly decided to take all the same classes together or formed study groups throughout their graduate training).

Advantages of cohorts. The themes which emerged from the data regarding the advantages of cohorts were: (a) *the sense of family*, (b) *the impact on learning*, and (c) *the availability of networking resources and job counseling*. The first theme regarding the benefits of cohort formation is *sense of family*. A female administrator described the familiarity of her cohort, "We were like brothers and sisters." In particular, those who participated in a cohort received high levels of support, felt strong group affiliation, increased their self-confidence, and felt a high comfort level and sense of security. These benefits were noted by several of the Danforth program graduates. A male elementary school principal commented, "The biggest benefit was...emotional support." Many administrators indicated that this support extended to the job. An assistant principal said, "I could tell you everyone's phone number

and call any one of them at work and I wouldn't feel bad that I was interrupting their day." The support system did not just include Danforth cohort members, but it also included their mentors. Cohort participants discussed how through collaborative efforts, they established a secure and trusting environment where group members were willing to share. A female high school assistant principal confirmed this idea,

> I think when you trust you are not afraid to make mistakes and you don't see them as mistakes in a negative sense; you see them as opportunities for growth. It's easier to go out there and step off the curb if you know you have a support system.

The second theme regarding cohorts was the *impact on learning*. Danforth program administrators indicated that cohort grouping increased academic performance and enhanced their reflective ability. Danforth program graduates described how completing administrative training as a group allowed for accelerated learning; once group dynamics were in place learning occurred more quickly. These graduates also felt they had a closer relationship with professors. One elementary school principal commented on the group process and how it enhanced learning. She said, I really liked being with the same people course to course because you already knew the way [they thought] so you knew...how to dialogue with them." Another administrator reflected on the shared perspectives of his cohort group and how he valued others' expertise. He noted, "We could learn from each other and bring that info to our next job."

Lastly, the Danforth graduates emphasized how the cohort allowed for job counseling and provided a built-in networking system. As cohort members searched and interviewed for administrative positions they discussed their experiences with their peers. In addition, the majority of the relationships established by these cohort members are ongoing. While many of the non-Danforth program

administrators only see fellow graduates at conferences, meetings, or an occasional get together, most of the Danforth graduates maintain social and professional relationships.

Disadvantages of cohorts - *"The 'haves' and the 'have nots.'"* The Danforth graduates cited several disadvantages of cohort grouping. Three themes regarding *identity, competition and jealousy*, and *limited perspectives* emerged from the data. Several administrators addressed the first theme of *identity*. Within the cohorts they reported role assignment, stereotyping, favoritism, formation of cliques, and alienation. Several administrators spoke about the formation of cliques within their Danforth program cohorts. One graduate commented, "It was interesting to see how the group split. The 'haves' and the 'have nots.' Those that were more high powered appeared to be more serious and viewed by some as brighter." An assistant principal talked about how some Danforth program cohort members alienated themselves when they individually completed the one required course outside the department. He told the following story,

> Four of us took an Ed Psych class together with undergrads, masters, and doctoral students. It was interesting that we found ourselves to be very isolated and we almost did that ourselves. We were also the most vocal and the most active and the most "everything" which is embarrassing. So I don't think we learned as much from the group as we needed.

The second theme regarding disadvantages of cohorts dealt with *competition and jealousy*. A few Danforth program cohort members reported increased competition. An elementary principal who completed the Danforth program described these feelings,

> Maybe the negative part of this is a certain level of competition. You knew there were other people that were turning in the same work you were, so you knew yours had better be up to par. You got to know those people and their abilities.

Another Danforth graduate sometimes sensed jealousy in her cohort. She commented, "I think that other people in the cohort sometimes felt that I had other advantages because I had a job and I had so many connections and so many prior experiences."

The final theme that emerged from the data was *limited perspective*. While several Danforth program graduates voiced concerned over the lack of "fresh voices" in a cohort, other cohort participants felt the group was balanced by the variety of expertise found in the group. One cohort participant commented, "The obvious disadvantage is you're not getting as broad a range of perspectives, but I think we were a pretty diverse group."

While the Danforth program administrators reported several disadvantages of cohorts, they suggested that the benefits of completing administrative training in a cohort far outweighed these disadvantages. A high school assistant principal who graduated from the Danforth program gave a very positive personal overview of cohorts,

> You are more willing to share what might concern you or the things that made you happy --your own successes. There's something about going through [a program] with one whole group and watching other people grow as you grow and watching some grow faster than others. It's a neat experience.

Ongoing relationships with mentors

A second finding which differentiated Danforth and non-Danforth program graduates focused on long term relationships with mentors. One Danforth graduate spoke for most of her cohort when she commented, "I would see a mentoring relationship as something that would last through your first few years." Most of the Danforth program graduates had developed strong relationships with their mentors and continue to seek their support, advice, and networking ability. Two graduates describe their continuing relationship with their mentors. The first administrator commented, "She offered a lot of insight into what good administration is. That's why I call her once a month to solicit advice." The

second graduate added, "She's been very supportive and encouraging. She did some mock interviews with me when I was going to apply for this position. I probably talk to her every few weeks." The majority of the non-Danforth administrators do not maintain professional or social relationships with their mentors unless they are currently working with them.

.Reflective Practice - "*Pearls of Wisdom*"

The third finding which differentiated the Danforth and the non-Danforth graduates was reflective practice. Although many of the administrators felt that reflective practice occurred during group activities (e.g., discussion, simulation, case studies, group debriefing, problem analysis), the Danforth program graduates emphasized that reflection was a critical element of their administrative preparation. They described how reflective practice was integrated into their training through journaling, reflective seminars, and internships. In addition, several Danforth administrators felt that reflection was a product of the cohort.

The administrators discussed how writing (e.g., research papers, journaling) promoted reflection. The Danforth program graduates, in particular, spoke at length about their journaling process. A Danforth program graduate noted, "We journaled about specific incidents, about the day, concerns, self-confidence, feelings, goals, and aspirations--everything. We used our journals for self-reflection and then got together...and reflected as a group on our journal writing." A fellow graduate felt journaling was a positive way to improve personal growth and enhance the thinking process without being concerned about grades.

Reflection seminars were another way administrators reflected during their administrative training. These seminars were scheduled monthly outside of class time and allowed students to delve into particular problems, to gain other perspectives on issues, and to make connections between their

field experiences and theory. In essence, these seminars allowed for thinking time. These sessions promoted continuous learning and often allowed students to learn from practitioners in the field since mentors and outside guests attended the sessions. A Danforth program graduate describes the value of these seminars,

> That was another really good part of the program--when the mentors got together with the mentees [during] our reflection seminars. Those were helpful because I got these little pearls of wisdom from each one of the other mentors. Each one had something to say. I would walk out with this little string of pearls every time I left.

At present four of the five administrator preparation programs studied have incorporated reflective type seminars into their programs. While these seminars are now routinely scheduled for students, not all the graduates interviewed from these four programs participated in reflection seminars because they graduated prior to their inception.

A third way reflective practice was integrated in the Danforth program was through internships. When a field experience provided opportunities for reflective practice, interns were able to make connections between events. A Danforth program graduate described this experience,

> You come to understand the threads that are woven or the branches that branch out from an experience. You begin to understand that things really aren't unique to each day. What happens on one day had roots somewhere else.

During internships, formal and informal feedback sessions provided opportunities for reflection for both mentees and mentors. An assistant principal who graduated from the Danforth program appreciated whatever time and advice his busy inner city school mentors could provide during his two Danforth program internship experiences. He spoke enthusiastically about his field experience,

> I had such an opportunity to have their time. They said later that they enjoyed that. That's where we had lots of reflection. It made them more conscious of what they were doing and why and what for because I would ask a lot of questions. We got together everyday.

A fellow Danforth program graduate summed up the reflective process she experienced during her graduate training,

> When I think about what we did, writing in the journals on a daily basis and having reflection sessions with everyone and the principals from other schools and talking about specific concerns and issues, it was such a good process and I wish it was happening now because I'd have so much more to contribute, so much more to ask. Reflection is a wonderful way to clear up a lot of the mystery and begin to realize, yes I'm on the right track.

Administrative Preparation: Findings Across Programs

Distinct differences existed between the Danforth and the non-Danforth program graduates regarding how student cohorts, reflective practice, and ongoing relationships with mentors affected job preparedness and learning. Yet, several general themes regarding internships and mentoring relationships emerged from an analysis of the data across the five administrator preparation programs.

Internships - *"Seeing the big picture"*

Administrators suggested that internships provided authenticity to the job, connected theory and practice, built confidence, allowed them to work with an expert, helped them understand political systems, and provided an access to a networking system. Administrators reported more satisfaction with their internship when their responsibilities were scaffolded by the mentor principal. Interns became more accustomed to the environment and increased their confidence when their mentor staggered activities. Choice of mentor principal often determined the value of the internship. The internship provided a safety net for those trying out their new skills and allowed them to make mistakes. Specifically, administrators reported that internships helped them, "...transition from interacting with people as a teacher to interacting with people as an administrator" as well as, "...get a sense of the day-to-day practicalities." Administrators also emphasized that the internship gave them a broad picture of the administrator's role. Field experience helped them, "...see the other side of the desk so to speak. When you're teaching you're

so involved in your subject matter particularly for the secondary level that all you focus on is the subject matter. You're so isolated, you don't see the big picture."

A final comment made by a Danforth program graduate was, "My program really prepared me to be an instructional leader. My internship helped prepare me to be a fire extinguisher. It's the theory as opposed to the practical and experiential." In addition, some of the administrators believed the internship provided networking resources and a marketing advantage when seeking work. A recent follow-up study at a non-Danforth program indicated that 26 out of 30 graduates who obtained administrative positions had completed internships. The department chairperson suggested that the internship, "...appears to be a vehicle for graduates to market themselves and gives them something to talk to other than their coursework" (W. Holland, personal communication, May 10, 1995).

Although most of the administrators who participated in internships viewed them as being a critical part of their job preparation, there were some negative viewpoints on the subject. Sometimes the school would utilize the intern to best benefit the school rather than to develop the skill level of the intern. Some interns were given repetitive tasks and limited responsibilities. Interns often had limited authority because of their nonpaid role in school. One administrator commented, "Most of my time was spent in discipline and it got to be a negative."

Mentoring Relationships

The program graduates also discussed different types of mentoring relationships and how mentors provided support, feedback, and opportunities for learning and reflection. Mentors shared information and helped interns understand school politics. Most of the administrators interviewed identified some type of mentoring relationship that they established during a work experience, graduate training, or while in their present job. They identified mentors who were assigned during internships

(i.e., mentor principals); those that were sought out; (i.e., educational leaders, supervisors, principals); those that sought out mentees for their leadership abilities, and those who influenced students during the course of graduate training (i.e., professors, department chairpersons, and program coordinators). Of those mentors identified, many of the administrators named certain professors as being particularly helpful throughout their graduate training. These professors were viewed as mentors because they were supportive, encouraging, understood the needs of the students, modeled practices, and communicated student strengths.

In summary, a Danforth graduate addressed many facets of mentoring relationships when she reflected on her experience:

> She [my mentor] allowed me to apply what I was learning. She was somebody to help me move forward. I had set some goals and objectives for myself and she was there to help me obtain those. I went into it thinking of it as a student teaching type of process and it's really not. She came to realize what my abilities were and the nice thing about the mentor relationship is that it has continued and we now are even serving together on a State Department Committee and she calls periodically to check in. I can call when I have a problem.

Beyond Administrator Preparation Programs: Significant Findings

Several prevalent themes emerged from the interview data that were extraneous to the research questions. The 25 administrators interviewed cited common experiences outside of their administrative training that contributed to their job preparation and learning. These experiences were not particular to just Danforth or non-Danforth program graduates, but to the entire group of administrators. In addition to their formal administrative training, these administrators identified their classroom teaching experiences, leadership roles, group experiences, previous work experience, on the job administrative experience, and life experiences as instrumental in preparing them for their administrative positions.

Reality of the Job: "*It Breaks Over Your Head Like a Wave*"

Although the administrators felt prepared for their job tasks, many were not prepared for the reality of the job. Even those with field experience felt overwhelmed by the work load, the immediacy of issues, the constraints on their time, and the politics of the job. An assistant principal in a large suburban high school, spoke about her two years on the job:

> In teaching you can build into your day slower periods when you feel you need it on the other end. In this job there is no control. This job breaks over your head like a wave--every two seconds there's another one. You never can get your breath.

Teaching

While the change in educational roles was often difficult, all 25 administrators identified their classroom teaching as vital to their preparation as a principal or assistant principal. One administrator noted the value of teaching, "You need to look at things through a teacher's perspective. Not having that ability or experience would make this job close to impossible." Additionally, classroom teaching experience helped administrators with parent, student, and teacher relationships; legal issues; the evaluation process; and curriculum development. Teaching also provided opportunities for administrators to develop oral and written communication skills, and interpersonal skills. Staff development opportunities afforded while teaching allowed for continual learning (e.g., new teaching techniques, training in adult education principles). Numerous administrators valued their special education experience; especially when they faced IEPs (Individualized Education Plans), legal issues, and curriculum development.

Many of the administrators had participated in the Beginning Educator Support Program (BEST) while teaching. They indicated this experience helped them understand the Connecticut Teaching Competencies and the teacher evaluation process. One graduate who had worked with the State

Department for two years before becoming a principal commented, "I trained assessors to assess and I found that in terms of supervision of teachers, that was the best experience that I could have had."

Leadership Roles

In addition to teaching experiences, all 25 administrators had taken on leadership roles prior to becoming an administrator. These leadership roles were within education in a teaching capacity, within education in a non-teaching capacity, or outside education. Leadership roles within education in a teaching capacity included: chairperson for a school or district-wide committee, team leader, teacher coordinator, student-teacher adviser, president of the teacher's union, and head of the curriculum evaluation committee. Leadership roles within education in a non-teaching capacity included: curriculum specialist, language arts coordinator, instructional specialist, and summer school director. Leadership roles outside of education included choir director and head of community groups.

In these leadership roles both within education and outside education, administrators learned to supervise people, to work collaboratively, to motivate others, to deal with legal issues, to delegate tasks, and to work within a system. These roles also helped administrators refine their oral and written communication skills, presentation skills, and interpersonal skills.

Group Experience

In addition to leadership experience, numerous administrators cited their group experience as being relevant to their administrative preparation. These administrators had been active participants of committees related to education; (e.g., Connecticut Mastery Testing Scoring Committee, evaluation committee, school development committee, curriculum review committee), as well as committees outside of school; (e.g., church committees, the grange, community groups). Committee work expanded their expertise in a particular area (e.g., curriculum, budget, finance, personnel) often giving them a bird's eye view of the administrative world and helped them develop team building skills.

Previous Work Experience

Several administrators mentioned that previous experience outside of education helped prepare them for their jobs. From experiences in counseling, social work, and corporate work, administrators developed skills in management, budgeting, problem solving, and conflict resolution. They also learned to work within a political structure and with the community.

Three themes emerged from the data regarding how administrators became prepared for their jobs prior to their formal administrative training. Some administrators as part of their teaching or non-teaching careers routinely took on leadership roles and involved themselves in learning situations because they wanted to expand their knowledge and remain a part of the educational community. It was only after years of involvement that they decided to seek formal administrative training. Other administrators sought out opportunities to increase their exposure to administration. An assistant principal in an urban junior high school set her goals on an administrative job the first day she began teaching. She commented:

> I always believe that wherever you aspire to that's where you should be. So I would never be at meetings so much with just teachers. I'd go to principal or administrative meetings. So they knew me--that was going to be my chair some day.

A third group was sought out for their leadership abilities and mentored by an administrator. These administrators were given opportunities to enhance their leadership skills and administrative knowledge. They were strongly encouraged by mentors to pursue administration.

Administrator Preparation Program Recommendations

Based on their past experiences and their perceptions of the needs of administrators, the graduates of the five administrator preparation programs made recommendations for changes in future training of administrators. Suggestions focused on internships, courses, administrative support, and

program leadership. All the administrators believed an internship was a crucial component of training. Suggestions were made for paid internships, longer internships (half a semester to a full year), and multiple internship experiences. Other recommendations included more extensive coursework in the following areas: (a) budgeting; (b) scheduling; (c) special education (i.e., laws, the IEP [Individualized Education Plan] process, diversity of learners); (d) technology; (e) curriculum (i.e., exposure to different levels and evaluation skills); (f) school law; and (g) statistics (i.e., application of statistics in reports, analyses, test results). The addition of Spanish as a required course was also recommended. Administrators suggested the "chunking of courses" (i.e., sequenced modules that are integrated throughout the program).

Summary

Developing leaders for future schools requires that individuals acquire "those capacities or qualities needed to exercise leadership in future schools" (Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1994, p. 11). The changing nature of school leadership provides a challenge to administrator preparation programs. Yet, no one framework for administrator training can ensure that aspiring administrators will be prepared to lead schools into the 21st century. This paper highlighted the importance of cohorts, mentoring relationships, internships, and reflective practice in the preparation of administrators. The research suggests that reflective practice, as an integral part of the instructional delivery structure, enhances learning. In addition, the findings suggest that program components which stress reliance on adult learning principles and cognitive psychology theory are more likely to ensure success of students.

Participation in a cohort and learning gained through reflective practice were considered significant contributors to the preparation of administrators. These components, as described by graduates, promoted adult learning. Students were able to direct their own learning, influence the

decision-making process, focus on workplace problems, draw from their experiences, and build strong relationships with peers. The support systems established through cohorts, as well as mentoring relationships, continued beyond graduation and were highly valued by beginning administrators who found themselves in new and often isolating roles. Such findings confirm research (Yerkes, Norris, Basom, & Barnett, 1994) suggesting that group cohesiveness may be enhanced when members have the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, evaluate their learning, and depend on others for support.

Administrators also noted the importance of internships to their job preparation. The success of these internships varied based on the internship site, the relationship with the mentor, and the scaffolding of intern activities. Internship experiences promoted adult learning when they provided a problem-centered approach to learning, an experiential process for acquiring knowledge, and an avenue for self-directedness. Cognitive psychology literature (Leithwood, Steinbach, & Begley, 1992) explores internships from the context through which learning is acquired. Learning is "situated" and therefore develops through collaborative social interaction and the social construction of knowledge (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989b). In particular, Lave and Wenger (1991) view internships as a type of apprenticeship through which an individual establishes membership in a community and becomes socialized. Interns become legitimate participants in their internship schools. This study confirmed Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion that the participation of interns is peripheral. An administrator's comments illustrates this idea, "The staff know you're an intern; you're not on payroll; why should they really listen to you?" Additionally, cognitive psychology research suggests that field experiences enhance the decision-making and problem-solving skills required in schools (Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1994).

Administrators also reported that reflective practice was important to their job preparedness as it promoted continuous learning, improved personal growth, was a way of making meaning, and enhanced

problem-solving skills. Since few problems that administrators face have predetermined solutions, administrators "must create knowledge in use as they practice" (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 3). The adult learning (e.g., Schön, 1983) and cognitive psychology literature (Leithwood & Stager, 1989) suggest that reflective practice provides the cognitive skills needed for such decision making.

Participants in this study valued mentoring relationships. Most of the Danforth program graduates have maintained relationships with their mentors because these connections gave the graduates a link to another person who understood the nature of their work. This finding should not be surprising since adult learning literature proposes that adults enjoy forming meaningful personal and professional relationships (Darkenwald, 1989).

This study offers a framework for administrator preparation to program administrators who are striving to improve the effectiveness of their programs. Based on the findings, the following suggestions addressing the issues of selection, support, and practical application of theory are recommended for improving administrative training. First, the program selection process should value the varied experiences and non-traditional backgrounds of program applicants. Such experiences (e.g., corporate work, community leadership, work on school committees, single parenthood) can provide future leaders with multiple perspectives and a broad vision as they reflect, solve problems, and create change in the educational arena. Second, program administrators and department chairpersons need to design administrator preparation programs which foster learning and provide a supportive environment for adults. Adult learners value support systems both in the learning environment and the workplace. Cohorts and mentoring relationships can provide such support during administrative training and when graduates reenter the workforce in new and often isolating leadership roles. Thirdly, learning needs to reflect workplace problems and promote the development of problem-solving skills and reflective

practice. Curriculum should be integrated and program content should be monitored and adjusted to address changing issues.

There are many areas of study requiring further inquiry. Since this study had a limited sample, particularly for individuals with varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds, further research is warranted regarding diversity issues within student cohorts. Additionally, further investigation is encouraged regarding how student cohorts affect program administrators and professors, and how these professionals can abate the potentially negative aspects of cohorts (e.g., competition, stereotyping, jealousy). Lastly, future studies should examine the breadth, variety, and responsibility levels of administrative internships.

Notes

[1] The term "administrator" refers to principals, assistant principals, and central office administrators.

[2] To develop the *Educational Administrator Job Preparedness Survey*, the researcher eliminated all negative items from the EAEP and cross referenced the remaining items with standards commonly expressed in: *Defining Effective Leadership for Connecticut's Schools* (Leithwood & Duke, 1993), the stated goals of the Danforth programs (Milstein & Associates, 1993), and *the National Policy Board for Educational Administration's Knowledge and Skill Base* (Thomson, 1993). Five additional items were added relating to sensitivity, policies and procedures, and philosophical and cultural values. These were based on a current review of administrative practices and behaviors, and suggestions from experts in educational administration. Sixty-three questions were written using a 5-point Likert response format. In addition, three questions were open-ended and seven questions elicited background data from the respondents. The researcher performed a factor analysis and determined that the survey had only one factor; "administrative skills, practices, and behaviors."

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